

Australian and Indonesian Male Students' Compliment Responses: A cross-culture male gender-based response strategy

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Abstract

When compliments are interpreted as sincere and spontaneous, the community can recognise them positively. Furthermore, when two people have a conversation with each other, they may or may not be involved in a power difference (-P) and distance (-D) between them. This study investigates compliment responses between Australian students as Native Speakers (NS) and Indonesian students as Non-Native Speakers (NNS). The study focuses the Compliment Responses (CRs) on specific cultural groups and cross-cultural comparisons between Indonesian and Australian cultures, based on gender and response strategies. Firstly, Indonesian male students will perceive compliments to be more flirtatious than innocent. Secondly, Australian male students will perceive compliments to be more objectively practical than emotional. Finally, in response to compliments, Australian students will use acceptance token agreements and deflections with more frequency than Indonesian students do. The study was designed in a qualitative method, which focused on a single group of two students. The study also used a purposive sampling focusing on reduced variations, simplified analyses, and facilitated group interviewing. In response to compliments, Indonesian male students tend to accept tokens less than Australians do. The Indonesians tend to seek agreement in the extent degree of equality and solidarity, which is similar to what the Australians do.

Keywords: compliment responses, Indonesian male students, Australian male students, gender and response strategies

Introduction

When compliments are interpreted as sincere and spontaneous, the community can recognise them positively. Furthermore, when two people have a conversation with each other, may or may not be involved in a power difference (-P) and distance (-D) between them. This system, proposed by Scollon and Scollon (1995, p. 45), indicates a solidarity politeness system (Holmes, 1995, p. 116) by expressing gratitude and sympathy, invitations, jokes, greetings and other social utterances, as well as the use of friendly address forms. The system represents equality and expresses closeness to each other. Brown and Levinson also point out that compliments are the main examples of speech acts which attract the attention of the hearer and the hearer's interest, wants, needs, goods (materials), as the first positive politeness strategy to imply a common ground or shared wants (1988, p. 103).

Compliment responses across cultures, furthermore, is worth investigating in relation to gender categories because compliments can be responded in different strategies. Responses may inhibit or allow the course of communication depending on equality-closeness relationships and difference-dominance based gender. (Farghal & Haggan, 2006, p. 94).

This study investigates male compliment responses between Australian students as Native Speakers (NS) and Indonesian students as Non-Native Speakers (NNS). The study then focuses the Compliment Responses (CRs) on specific cultural groups and cross-cultural comparisons between Indonesian and Australians cultures, based on gender and response strategies.

Research Hypotheses

Firstly, Indonesian male students will perceive compliments to be more flirtatious than innocent. Secondly, Australian male students will perceive compliments to be more objectively practical than emotional. Finally, in response to compliments, Australian students will use acceptance token agreements and deflections with more frequency than Indonesian students in responding compliments. Australian students tend to accept compliments, which are unimportant but are meant to show particular intentions or feelings, which may not be sincere. In addition, the Australian students tend to change a topic of conversation when they are complimented.

Research Questions

How do Indonesian students and Australian students respond compliments?

A. Do Indonesian students and Australian students respond compliments differently?

B. Do Indonesian male students and Australian male students respond compliments differently?

Method

This study was designed in a qualitative method, which focused on a single group of two students. The study also used a purposive sampling (Patton, 1991) that focuses on reduced variations, simplifies analysis, and facilitates group interviewing.

Data Collection

Information was collected in CR utterances using an audio recorder in naturally occurring conversations in two groups within the University of Canberra library, classrooms and open-air areas. The information was collected under participants' consent for having their relevant utterances in CRs of the conversations recorded, in which each conversation demonstrated a gender-based male group of participants. However, they were not aware of being recorded when the conversations occurred, and the researcher did not participate in the conversations. After being recorded, individual interviews were held with each of the participants considering the depth-data interpretation. The CRs utterances were then transcribed and the data were analysed. The results of interviews were explained in the discussion.

Participant Characteristics

The study involved students ranging in age from 23 to 45 years old. Group 1 was two Indonesian males. Group 2 was two Australian males.

Limitation of the Study

This study was a preliminary research, which was limited to a number of participants and a short time of research.

Data Analysis

Holmes' (1988, 1993 cited in Heidari et al., 2009, p. 21) categories of CR strategies are **(A) Accept:** (1) Appreciation Token; (2) Agreeing Utterance; (3) Downgrading Qualifying Utterance; (4) Returning Compliment; **(B) Reject:** (5) Disagreeing Utterance; (6) Question Accuracy; (7) Challenging Sincerity; **(C) Evade:** (8) Shift Credit; (9) Informative Comment, and (10) Request Reassurance.

Brown and Levinson's (1988) five strategies, namely *Noticing*, *Exaggerating*, *Intensifying interests*, *Using in-group identity marker*, *Seeking Agreement*, *Avoiding Disagreement*, *Asserting Common Ground* and *Joke* show positive politeness strategies, analysed based on the findings of this study, and taken into account gender-related cross cultural characteristics. Based on this grouping, contrastive analysis between the CRs was conducted.

Findings and Discussion

Group #1

A conversation of two Indonesian males was about paying compliments on appearance. It was a joke response because A complimented B's appearance using "formal dress". B's response indicated his acceptance token and asserting common ground and joke of A's compliment by saying *No surprise*, showed 'yes'. The males tended to be flirtatious on appearance and related it to a sexual attractiveness.

Group #2

A part of conversation between two Australian males after a grammar class showed 'logical' and 'yeah'. The words can be categorised into acceptance token 'yeah' and evade 'logical'. The words also show the responses indicate solidarity politeness showing equality (-P) and closeness (-D), and implicit claims of reciprocity of shared knowledge to reflexivity of the students' wants. In response to compliments, the utterance (2), (4) and (6) appear to be straightforward. The responses approve of the compliments because the responses are practical and direct, and do not try to conceal their feelings. The directness and practicality appear to be typical male conversations.

Conclusion

In the groups of this study, Indonesian male students tend to be flirtatious in their jokes while Australian males ones tend to be direct and practical. In response to compliments, Indonesian students tend to accept tokens less than Australians do. The Indonesians tend to seek agreement in the extent degree of equality and solidarity, which is similar to what the Australian do.

Finally, Indonesian students' cultures show relatively similar to Australian students' cultures in CRs. In relation to CRs based on gender, the student groups show differences in male-male CRs in the degree of deference and solidarity.

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